SŪRAH 61

Al-Ṣaff
(The Ranks)

Prologue

This *sūrah* seeks to establish two major themes which permeate its entire text. It also includes a number of secondary references which relate to those major themes.

The first aim of the *sūrah* is to establish in the conscience of every Muslim the fact that his religion is the final version of the divine system God has laid down for mankind. There were earlier versions, each suited for a particular period of human history. There were also experiences in the lives of earlier messengers and past communities that afforded much to reflect upon. All these have paved the way for this final version of the one divine faith. It incorporates God's final message for mankind, which He has willed to prevail over all other religions.

Hence, the *sūrah* mentions Moses' message, making it clear that his people caused him much grief and deviated from his message. They had gone astray and were no longer to be trustees of the divine faith: "*Now when Moses spoke to his people, he said: 'My people! Why do you cause me grief, when you know that I am a messenger God has sent to you?' So, when they swerved from the right way, God let their hearts swerve from the truth. God does not bestow His guidance upon evildoers.*" (Verse 5)

The *sūrah* then mentions Jesus' message to establish that Jesus was sent to carry on Moses' earlier message, confirming what was revealed before him of the Torah. He was also given the task of paving the way for the final message, giving news of the Messenger who was to carry it, and serving as a link between the first and the last divine religions. *"And also Jesus, the son of Mary, said: Children of Israel! I am God's messenger to you, [sent] to confirm the Torah revealed before me, and to give news of a messenger that will come after me, whose name shall be Aḥmad."* (Verse 6) Hence, his task was to carry the trust of the divine faith after Moses and then to give it to the Messenger whose coming he announced.

It was always confirmed, according to God's knowledge and by His will, that these steps would eventually lead to a final and permanent version to establish God's faith in human life, and this by the final Messenger: *"It is He who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, so that He may cause it to prevail over all other religions, however hateful this may be to the idolaters."* (Verse 9)

This first clear purpose of the *sūrah* gives rise to its second purpose. When a Muslim is fully aware of this fact, knows the history of the divine faith and is aware of his share of it, he realizes the duties that this trust involves. Hence, he has a clear and sincere motive for striving to ensure that this faith prevails over all other religions, just as God wants it to do. There is no longer any vacillation in practically carrying out what one verbally has proposed to do. It is inappropriate for a believer to declare his intention to strive for God's cause but then to refrain from doing so. According to some reports, it appears that there were some cases of this sort. Hence, the *sūrah* starts with a proclamation that the entire universe and all that is in it unceasingly glorify God. *"Believers! Why do you say what you do not do? Most loathsome is it in the sight of God that you say what you do not do! God loves indeed those who fight in His cause in solid ranks, as though they were a firm and compact building."* (Verses 2–4)

In the middle of the *sūrah*, the believers are called upon to take part in the most profitable transaction that they could have in this life and in the life to come: *"Believers! Shall I point out to you a bargain that will save you from grievous suffering? You are to believe in God and His Messenger,*

and to strive hard in God's cause with your possessions and your lives. This is for your own good, if you but knew it. He will forgive you your sins, and [in the life to come] will admit you into gardens through which running waters flow, and into goodly mansions in the gardens of Eden. That is the supreme triumph! And [He will grant you] yet another thing that you dearly love: help from God and a victory soon to come. Give you the good news to the believers." (Verses 10–13)

The *sūrah* ends with an appeal to the believers to be the helpers in furthering God's cause, just like Jesus' disciples who supported him when the Israelites continued to deny his message and were hostile towards him: "*Believers! Be helpers [in the cause] of God; just as Jesus, the son of Mary, said to the disciples: "Who will be my helpers in God's cause?" The disciples said: "We shall be [your] helpers in God's cause." And so some of the Children of Israel came to believe whereas others denied the truth. But We have given those who believed strength over their enemy and they were the ones to prevail.*" (Verse 14)

These two purposes are very clear throughout the *sūrah*, taking up nearly all of its text. There only remains a denunciation of those who reject the final message, which is clearly linked to the two main themes. We see this clearly stated after Jesus gave the news of the impending appearance of the final Messenger, the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him): "*But when he came to them with all evidence of the truth, they said: 'This is plain sorcery.' Who could be more wicked than one who invents a falsehood about God, when he is only being called upon to submit to Him? God does not bestow His guidance upon the wrongdoers. They aim to extinguish God's light with their mouths, but God will spread His light in all its fullness, however hateful this may be to the unbelievers.*"(Verses 6–8)

Thus, every Muslim is clear in his mind that his faith is the final version of the religion God wants to be established on earth. He realizes that the trust of this divine faith is given to him, and he knows that he is required to strive for God's cause as God wants. His line is clear, leaving no room for ambiguity, hesitation or faltering. The goal is well defined and the way to achieve it is made clear.

With this goal-defining directive we also have clear pointers to the nature of the moral code a Muslim must follow. A Muslim must

demonstrate consistency between his conscience and his action. He cannot say one thing and then do another. His appearance must not fundamentally differ from what he conceals within himself. He must be consistent in all situations, dedicated in his service to God's cause, clear in both his intention and action, moving with steady steps, collaborating with his brothers so that the Muslim community is seen to be solid and firm like a building with strong foundations.

Al-Ṣaff (The Ranks)

سُورَةُ الصَّفِّ

In the Name of God, the Lord of Grace, the Ever Merciful

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

All that is in the heavens and in the earth extols God's limitless glory: for He alone is the almighty, truly wise. (1)

سَبَّحَ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ ۖ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿١﴾

Believers! Why do you say what you do not do? (2)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لِمَ تَقُولُونَ مَا لَا تَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٢﴾

Most loathsome is it in the sight of God that you say what you do not do! (3)

كَبُرَ مَقْتًا عِندَ اللَّهِ أَن تَقُولُوا مَا لَا تَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٣﴾

God loves indeed those who fight in His cause in solid ranks, as though they were a firm and compact building. (4)

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِهِ صَفًّا كَأَنَّهُم بُنْيَانٌ مَّرْصُوصٌ ﴿٤﴾

Now when Moses spoke to his people, he said: "My people! Why do you cause me grief, when you know that I am a messenger God has sent to you?" So, when they swerved from the right way, God let their hearts swerve from the truth. God does not bestow His guidance upon evildoers. (5)

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ يَا قَوْمِ لِمَ تُؤْذُونَنِي وَقَد تَّعْلَمُونَ أَنِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ إِلَيْكُمْ ۖ فَلَمَّا زَاغُوا أَزَاغَ اللَّهُ قُلُوبَهُمْ ۚ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْفَاسِقِينَ ﴿٥﴾

وَإِذْ قَالَ عِيسَى ٱبْنُ مَرْيَمَ يَٰبَنِىٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ إِنِّى
رَسُولُ ٱللَّهِ إِلَيْكُم مُّصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَىَّ مِنَ
ٱلتَّوْرَىٰةِ وَمُبَشِّرًۢا بِرَسُولٍ يَأْتِى مِنۢ بَعْدِى ٱسْمُهُۥٓ
أَحْمَدُ ۖ فَلَمَّا جَآءَهُم بِٱلْبَيِّنَٰتِ قَالُوا۟ هَٰذَا سِحْرٌ
مُّبِينٌ ﴿٦﴾

And also Jesus, the son of Mary, said: "Children of Israel! I am God's messenger to you, [sent] to confirm the Torah revealed before me, and to give news of a messenger that will come after me, whose name shall be Aḥmad." But when he came to them with all evidence of the truth, they said: "This is plain sorcery." (6)

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنِ ٱفْتَرَىٰ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ ٱلْكَذِبَ
وَهُوَ يُدْعَىٰٓ إِلَى ٱلْإِسْلَٰمِ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِى
ٱلْقَوْمَ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿٧﴾

Who could be more wicked than one who invents a falsehood about God, when he is only being called upon to submit to Him? God does not bestow His guidance upon the wrongdoers. (7)

يُرِيدُونَ لِيُطْفِـُٔوا۟ نُورَ ٱللَّهِ بِأَفْوَٰهِهِمْ وَٱللَّهُ مُتِمُّ
نُورِهِۦ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ ٱلْكَٰفِرُونَ ﴿٨﴾

They aim to extinguish God's light with their mouths, but God will spread His light in all its fullness, however hateful this may be to the unbelievers. (8)

هُوَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُۥ بِٱلْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ
ٱلْحَقِّ لِيُظْهِرَهُۥ عَلَى ٱلدِّينِ كُلِّهِۦ ۙ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ
ٱلْمُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٩﴾

It is He who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, so that He may cause it to prevail over all other religions, however hateful this may be to the idolaters. (9)

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ هَلْ أَدُلُّكُمْ عَلَىٰ تِجَٰرَةٍ
تُنجِيكُم مِّنْ عَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ ﴿١٠﴾

Believers! Shall I point out to you a bargain that will save you from grievous suffering? (10)

تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِۦ وَتُجَٰهِدُونَ فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ بِأَمْوَٰلِكُمْ وَأَنفُسِكُمْ ۚ ذَٰلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١١﴾

You are to believe in God and His Messenger, and to strive hard in God's cause with your possessions and your lives. This is for your own good, if you but knew it. (11)

يَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ وَيُدْخِلْكُمْ جَنَّٰتٍ تَجْرِى مِن تَحْتِهَا ٱلْأَنْهَٰرُ وَمَسَٰكِنَ طَيِّبَةً فِى جَنَّٰتِ عَدْنٍ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ ٱلْفَوْزُ ٱلْعَظِيمُ ﴿١٢﴾

He will forgive you your sins, and [in the life to come] will admit you into gardens through which running waters flow, and into goodly mansions in the gardens of Eden. That is the supreme triumph! (12)

وَأُخْرَىٰ تُحِبُّونَهَا ۖ نَصْرٌ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَفَتْحٌ قَرِيبٌ ۗ وَبَشِّرِ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٣﴾

And [He will grant you] yet another thing that you dearly love: help from God and a victory soon to come. Give you the good news to the believers. (13)

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ كُونُوٓا۟ أَنصَارَ ٱللَّهِ كَمَا قَالَ عِيسَى ٱبْنُ مَرْيَمَ لِلْحَوَارِيِّۧنَ مَنْ أَنصَارِىٓ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ ۖ قَالَ ٱلْحَوَارِيُّونَ نَحْنُ أَنصَارُ ٱللَّهِ ۖ فَـَٔامَنَت طَّآئِفَةٌ مِّنۢ بَنِىٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ وَكَفَرَت طَّآئِفَةٌ ۖ فَأَيَّدْنَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ عَلَىٰ عَدُوِّهِمْ فَأَصْبَحُوا۟ ظَٰهِرِينَ ﴿١٤﴾

Believers! Be helpers [in the cause] of God; just as Jesus, the son of Mary, said to the disciples: "Who will be my helpers in God's cause?" The disciples said: "We shall be [your] helpers in God's cause." And so some of the Children of Israel came to believe whereas others denied the truth. But We have given those who believed strength over their enemy and they were the ones to prevail. (14)

Words and Actions

> *All that is in the heavens and in the earth extols God's limitless glory: for He alone is the almighty, truly wise.* (Verse 1)

The whole universe participates in this glorification of God Almighty whose might is combined with His infinite wisdom. This glorification begins this *sūrah*, which declares to Muslims that their religion is the last and final version of the divine faith. They are placed in a position of trustees of this faith based on God's oneness, denouncing all deviation perpetrated by unbelievers and idolaters. Muslims are also called upon to strive in support of this faith, which God has willed to prevail over all other religions, hateful as this may be to unbelievers. This opening, thus, implies that the trust given to Muslims belongs to the entire universe; the faith they strive for is the faith of all creatures in the heavens and the earth. Hence, this religion's prevalence is a universal phenomenon, one that is in line with the whole universe as it turns to God Almighty.

A group of believers are strongly reproached for something they did that was particularly hateful to God. This was inappropriate behaviour for believers:

> *Believers! Why do you say what you do not do? Most loathsome is it in the sight of God that you say what you do not do! God loves indeed those who fight in His cause in solid ranks, as though they were a firm and compact building.* (Verses 2–4)

Ibn 'Abbās reports that prior to making *Jihād* obligatory, some believers used to say: "We wish that God would tell us what action is most loved by Him, so that we could do it." God instructed His Messenger to say that what God loves most is a belief in Him that allows no room for doubt, and striving against deviant people who reject the faith. However, when *Jihād* was made obligatory, a number of believers found it difficult, and they disliked itdistasteful. Hence the revelation of the verses saying: "*Believers! Why do you say what you do not do? Most loathsome is it in the sight of God that you say what you do not do!*" (Verse 2–3) Al-Ṭabarī also confirmed this in his commentary on the *sūrah*.

On the other hand, Ibn Kathīr says in his commentary that the majority of scholars agree that these verses were revealed when some Muslims turned away from *Jihād* when it was declared a duty. He adds that this is the same as other verses in the Qur'ān: "*Are you not aware of those who have been told, 'Hold back your hands [from fighting], and attend regularly to prayer, and pay your* zakāt *[i.e. the purifying dues]'? When, at length, the order for fighting was issued to them, some of them stood in awe of men as one should stand in awe of God – or in even greater awe – and said, 'Our Lord! Why have you ordered us to fight? If only You had granted us a delay for a little while!' Say, 'Brief is the enjoyment of this world, whereas the life to come is the best for all who are God-fearing. None of you shall be wronged by as much as a hair's breadth. Wherever you may be death will overtake you, even though you be in towers built up strong and high.'*" (4: 77–78)

Qatādah and al-Ḍaḥḥāq say that this verse reproaches those who used to boast about their exploits, claiming that they had fought and killed the enemy, when they had not done so.

Looking at these verses, their context and the mention of fighting, we feel that the occasion inviting their revelation was the one mentioned by the majority of scholars and by Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī. However, Qur'ānic texts always take dimensions that go beyond the individual events which they address. They also comment on many other events in addition to the immediate occasion. Therefore, we look at these verses according to their general import, without forgetting the immediate events for which they were revealed.

The *sūrah* starts then with a reproach for behaviour in one or more actual events: "*Believers! Why do you say what you do not do?*" (Verse 2) It then denounces this action and its lack of morality in a doubly powerful way: "*Most loathsome is it in the sight of God that you say what you do not do!*" (Verse 3) What is viewed by God as most loathsome must certainly be very hateful and repugnant. This statement is sufficient then to make believers view this in the vilest of terms, particularly as they are addressed by God as people who have accepted His religion and who believe in Him.

The next verse refers to that particular matter when they did something different to what they used to profess, namely *Jihād*. It defines what God

likes in this question and what earns His pleasure: "*God loves indeed those who fight in His cause in solid ranks, as though they were a firm and compact building.*" (Verse 4) This is not mere fighting, but fighting for God's cause, in collaboration with the Muslim community, within its ranks, and with resolve and steadfastness, so that believers remain "*in solid ranks, as though they were a firm and compact building.*"

Moral Values in Practice

We have said on several occasions that as it was being revealed, the Qur'ān was carrying on with a process of nation building. Its aim was to build a community that carried the trust of the divine message, implemented its approach and established its system in human life. It was necessary for this purpose that the Qur'ān should undertake the reform of its individuals, establish its bonds as a community, and build it as a living nation in practice. All of this was to be accomplished at the same time. A Muslim is not a Muslim unless he functions within a community. It is inconceivable for Islam to be put into practice unless it functions in a community with well-defined bonds, a system and goal. Its ultimate goal applies to the community as a whole, but it also applies at the same time to each individual. This goal consists of establishing the divine system in people's consciences and practices on earth. To achieve the latter, Islam must live in an actual community that implements it fully.

Islam places much emphasis on the individual's conscience and responsibility, but it is certainly not a religion of individuals who dedicate themselves to worship in their respective little corners. This does not establish Islam within the individual's own conscience, let alone in his whole life. Islam was not revealed in such isolation. Rather, it was revealed to establish its criteria and standards in human life. It aims to put its mark on every individual and collective activity in every direction. Mankind do not live as individuals, but as groups, communities and nations. And Islam wants to provide people with its controls as they conduct their lives. Hence, it is so structured as to cater for people as they live. Its morality, manners, rules and systems are all formulated on this basis. When Islam directs its attention to the conscience of the

individual, it moulds this conscience on the basis that the individual lives in a community. Both the individual and the community turn to God and seek His pleasure. Therefore, a Muslim works within his community to fulfil the religious trust on earth and to establish the Islamic system in life.

Right from the very first day of the Islamic message, a Muslim community was established under the leadership of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Its individuals had their commitments towards their community, which also had its special entity distinguishing it from all other communities. It had its values that related to the human conscience but which looked at the same time to the life and welfare of the community. All this took place before the Islamic state was established in Madīnah. Indeed, the formation of this community was the means by which the Islamic state was later established.

When we look at these three verses we find that the morality of the individual is intertwined with the needs of the community, under the authority of religious faith. By its very nature, this faith can function fully in human life only in the form of a system that is properly served and protected.

The first two of the three verses under discussion refer to God's punishment and a strong censure if believers say something that is belied by their deeds. Thus, these two verses delineate the hugely important qualities of truthfulness and consistency in a Muslim's personality. A Muslim must reflect the same image in his inner self and in his appearance. His actions must be consistent with his words. This applies in all situations and goes far beyond the call to *Jihād* to which the third verse refers.

The Qur'ān places great emphasis on this Islamic characteristic, which is also repeatedly emphasized in the *sunnah*. Denouncing the Jews, God says: "*How can you bid others to piety and forget yourselves even while you are reciting the Book? Do you not understand?*" (2: 44) "*They say: 'We do obey you,' but when they leave you, some of them devise, in secret, something different from what you advocate.*" (4: 81) "*There is a kind of man who pleases you greatly in the present life by what he says, and he cites God as witness to what is in his heart, whereas he is the most antagonistic of adversaries. Yet, no sooner does he turn away than he strives to spread corruption in*

the world, destroying crops and progeny. God does not love corruption." (2: 204–205) The Prophet says: "The three distinctive marks of a hypocrite are: he lies when he speaks, and breaks his promises, and he is untrue to his trust." [Related by al-Bukhārī, Muslim, al-Tirmidhī and al-Nasā'ī.] There are numerous *aḥādīth* that emphasize the same concept. Perhaps the *ḥadīth* we will quote now includes one of the most subtle and refined directives by the Prophet to reiterate this moral aspect of Islam. Imām Aḥmad and Abū Dāwūd relate this report by 'Abdullāh ibn 'Āmir ibn Rabī'ah: "God's Messenger came to us when I was a young boy. I wanted to go out to play, but my mother said to me, ''Abdullāh, come and I will give you something.' The Prophet said to her, 'What do you want to give him?' She replied, 'Dates.' He said, 'If you would not give him anything, it would have been recorded against you as a lie'."

Perhaps Imām Aḥmad was guided by this *ḥadīth* when he travelled a long distance to meet someone whom he wanted to ask about another *ḥadīth*. However, when he arrived at the man's place, he saw him raising his robe in a way that suggested to his mule that it contained food, but there was nothing in the robe. Imām Aḥmad then felt that he should not report the *ḥadīth* reported by this man simply because he had lied to his mule.

A Muslim's conscience is reared to such a fine moral standard so as to build the character that can be entrusted with the establishment of the divine system in human life. This is what we see in this *sūrah*, which provides an important aspect of education for the Muslim community and its preparation to shoulder its great trust.

The *Jihād* Duty

Let us now consider the issue of *Jihād* which these verses addressed at the time of their revelation. We find here several points that need to be appreciated.

We see firstly that human beings may experience moments of weakness and this is when they need God's help to combat such shortcomings. They need repeated reminders and regular education. These verses refer to a group of Muslims who, according to some reports, belonged to the Muhājirīn, the early Muslims who migrated with the Prophet from

Makkah to Madīnah. Whilst in Makkah, they wished, in all enthusiasm, that God would allow them to fight, but they were told to hold back and attend to their worship duties instead. However, when later in Madīnah they were told to fight, at the time that was considered appropriate, they held a different attitude: "*Are you not aware of those who have been told, 'Hold back your hands [from fighting], and attend regularly to prayer, and pay your* zakāt *[i.e. the purifying dues]'? When, at length, the order for fighting was issued to them, some of them stood in awe of men as one should stand in awe of God – or in even greater awe – and said, 'Our Lord! Why have you ordered us to fight? If only You had granted us a delay for a little while!'*" (4: 77) Other reports suggest that they were a group of the Madīnan Muslims who asked about the action God loves most so that they could perform it. However, when they were ordered to fight for God's cause, they disliked this.

As we reflect on this, we realize that regular and repeated encouragement, directives and strengthening are all necessary for the human soul as it faces difficult tasks and responsibilities. Only with such repeated encouragement can the human soul maintain its path and overcome its weaknesses, setting its sight on higher objectives. Moreover, we realize that we must not ask to be given great goals when we face neither pressure nor difficulty. This because we may not be able to fulfil what we ask God to assign to us. Here, we see some early Muslims weakening to the extent that they say one thing and do another. Hence they faced this strong reproach from God.

Secondly, we need to reflect on the phraseology of the verse that speaks of God's love for those who fight for His cause in closed ranks, as though they were a firm and compact building. This represents profound encouragement to fight for God's cause. This statement was first made to deal with a case of reluctance and turning away from fighting, but this immediate cause does not change the fact that the encouragement is meant for all times and all peoples. Hence, there is a definite and constant purpose behind it.

Islam neither likes nor encourages fighting, but it makes it a duty on Muslims because life necessitates it, and because the purpose behind it is very important. Islam presents the final version of the divine system to humanity. Although this system meets all the needs of an upright

human nature, it requires that people exert themselves to rise to its standard and maintain it. On the other hand, there are numerous forces on earth that dislike this system and try to undermine it, because it deprives those forces of many privileges that are based on values Islam considers false and which it aims to eradicate from human life. These evil forces try to exploit people's weaknesses and their slackening after they have attained the high standard to which Islam elevates them. They also exploit people's ignorance and inherited values to oppose Islam and prevent the establishment of its system. Evil can muster great forces and falsehood is wont to boast of its power; Satan is indeed wicked and cunning. Hence, the advocates of faith who try to establish the Islamic system and protect it must be strong in order to overcome the agents of evil and Satan's supporters. They must be strong in their moral values, and tough in their fighting against evil. They must resort to combat when it is the only way to guarantee the freedom of action that promotes the Islamic system, and the freedom to believe in it and implement it in human life.

They fight for God's cause, not for their own glory or for any bonds of race, nationality, tribe or clan. The aim of their fight is that God's word reigns supreme, for the Prophet says: "Whoever fights to make God's word supreme fights for God's cause." [Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.]

God's word in this context is an expression of His will. What appears to us human beings, of God's will is that which conforms to the system that operates the universe, which in its entirety glorifies God and praises Him. The final version of God's divine faith, Islam, is the one that fits perfectly with the universal system. It makes the whole universe, including human beings, implement God's law, to the exclusion of all other laws.

It was inevitable that this faith should be opposed by individuals, classes and states. It was also inevitable that Islam should proceed along its way despite such opposition. Hence, it was necessary that *Jihād* should become obligatory on Muslims in support of this faith and for the purpose of making God's word supreme on earth. Hence, God loves those who fight for His cause with complete unity of hearts and unwavering dedication.

Finally, we need to reflect a little on the description of the state fighters should be in when they undertake *Jihād* for God's cause. They should be "*in solid ranks, as though they were a firm and compact building.*" (Verse 4) This is an individual's obligation discharged in a collective form, i.e. in a community with a clear system. This is because those who stand against Islam marshal their forces and try to raise great coalitions against it. Hence, the soldiers of Islam must face its enemies standing in solid and straight ranks. It is in the nature of the Islamic faith that when it triumphs it moves to establish a solid community. Hence, the image of an individual believer, worshipping God on his own, striving and living alone is far removed from the nature of this faith and its duties. This is true both at the time of *Jihād* and fighting, and at a time when victory has been secured and the Islamic community established.

This condition, which God loves for believers, portrays the nature of their faith and explains for them the landmarks on their way. It illustrates the nature of the close cooperation between them as portrayed by this creative Qur'ānic image: solid ranks like a firm and compact building. It is a building in which every brick is firmly placed in position, fulfilling its specific function. The whole edifice may collapse if one of its bricks moves out of place, whether forward or backward, so as not to firmly link with the one next to it in the higher or lower row or on either of its two sides. This is an expression that shows the reality, not merely gives a simile. It raises before us the nature of the Muslim community, the relations between individuals in this community, their feelings and united action within the overall system and towards a well-defined goal.

Denounced Attitude

The *sūrah* moves on to speak about the history of this divine system and the stages it went through with the messages revealed before Islam:

> *Now when Moses spoke to his people, he said: 'My people! Why do you cause me grief, when you know that I am a messenger God has sent to you?' So, when they swerved from the right way, God let their hearts swerve from the truth. God does not bestow His guidance upon evildoers. And also Jesus, the son of Mary, said: 'Children of Israel! I am God's messenger to you, [sent] to confirm the Torah revealed before*

me, and to give news of a Messenger that will come after me, whose name shall be Aḥmad.' (Verses 5–6)

Moses was the one who saved the Children of Israel from Pharaoh and his tyranny. He was God's messenger to them, their leader and teacher. Yet the grief that they caused him was of the extended type, taking many colours and forms. His struggle to put them on the right course was hard, tiring and trying. In the accounts the Qur'ān gives of Moses and his people we read about the different aspects of the grief they caused him and how hard he had to struggle to reform their belief system.

For example, they discouraged Moses' efforts to persuade Pharaoh to let them go free. So whilst he exposed himself to Pharaoh's wrath, they were safe having accepted their lot and humiliation. They even blamed Moses for worsening their plight: "*We have been oppressed before you came to us, and since you have come to us.*" (7: 129) The suggestion being that they did not see much good coming their way as a result of his message, or that they blamed him for this latest round of oppression.

No sooner did Moses, guided by God, deliver them from Pharaoh's humiliation – He caused Pharaoh and his people to drown before their very eyes – than they inclined themselves to a type of worship akin to Pharaoh's people: *We led the Children of Israel across the sea; and thereupon they came upon people who were dedicated to the worship of some idols of theirs. Said the Children of Israel: "Moses, set up a god for us like the gods they have.*" (7: 138) Again, Moses had not been gone long for the appointment with his Lord to receive the tablets when the Sāmirī led them astray as he "*produced for them the effigy of a calf, which made a lowing sound. 'This,' they said, 'is your deity and the deity of Moses; but he has forgotten.'*" (20: 88)

They were also dissatisfied with their desert food, which was manna and quails. Thus they complained to their prophet: "*Moses! We can no longer put up with one kind of food. Pray to your Lord, then, to bring forth for us some of what the earth produces of green herbs, cucumber, garlic, lentils and onions.*" (2: 61) Mention should also be made here of the cow they were required to slaughter, yet they continued to demand explanations, seeking excuses and behaving impolitely to their prophet and to their

Lord. Time after time they said to Moses: "*Pray on our behalf to your Lord to make plain to us what kind of cow she should be.*" (2: 68) "*Pray on our behalf to your Lord to make clear to us of what colour she should be.*" (2: 69) "*Pray on our behalf to your Lord to make plain to us of what exact type she should be, for to us cows are much alike.*" (2: 70) When finally they ran out of excuses, "*They sacrificed her, although they had almost left it undone.*" (2: 71)

They requested that a day be assigned to them when they would not work. But when the Sabbath was ordained for them, they violated its rules. Later, when they were close to the Holy Land, which God told them they would enter, they stalled, not daring to go forward, while at the same time they spoke insolently to Moses: "*Mighty people dwell in that land, and we will surely not enter it unless they depart from it. If they do depart, then we will enter.*" (5: 22) He kept encouraging them, assuring them of the great success awaiting them, if they would only do what God had bidden them to do. Nonetheless, their insolence and disbelief reached new heights: "*They said, Moses, we will never go in so long as they are in it. Go forth, then, you and your Lord, and fight, both of you. We shall stay here.*" (5: 24)

They gave Moses much more grief, putting questions to him, making suggestions, and even starting a rebellion. Furthermore, as related in *aḥādīth*, they also falsely accused him. The *sūrah* mentions here how Moses remonstrated with them in a friendly way: "*My people! Why do you cause me grief, when you know that I am a messenger God has sent to you?*" (Verse 5) They knew for certain that he was God's messenger, but he did not put this fact across in a strong and assertive way. Rather, he simply gave them a remonstrating reminder. The result was that they swerved from the right way after being given every possible means of sticking to it. Hence, God let them go further astray and their hearts were no longer fit to receive guidance. "*God does not bestow His guidance upon evildoers.*" (Verse 5) Thus their trusteeship of the divine faith was over. They were no longer fit to carry God's message after they had gone so far astray.

Then Jesus came, saying: "*Children of Israel! I am God's messenger to you.*" (Verse 6) He did not say to them that he was God or the son of God or a manifestation of God. He was simply a messenger sent "*to*

confirm the Torah revealed before me, and to give news of a messenger that will come after me, whose name shall be Aḥmad." (Verse 6)

Thus we see how the divine faith moved from one stage to the next, with all the stages interrelated, moving in the same direction, stretching from heaven to the earth: a long chain moving from link to link. This is the proper image, one worthy of God's design and constitution. It is basically the same approach, taking slightly different forms, according to what suits the needs, experience, knowledge and potential of humanity at each particular stage, until it reaches full maturity. Only then does the last stage arrive and the final form of divine faith be given: perfect, complete, addressing a mature mind that has benefited from all past experience. It opens the way so that the human mind works to its full potential within the method set for man and his abilities.

That Jesus gave the news of the impending arrival of Aḥmad, (another name of the Prophet Muḥammad), is absolutely confirmed by this verse, whether the Gospels mention this or not. Note also that the circumstances surrounding the writing of these Gospels and the way they were written make them totally unreliable on this issue.

The Qur'ān was read to the Jews and Christians in the Arabian Peninsula, including the verse that speaks of the Prophet Muḥammad as "*the unlettered Prophet whom they shall find described in the Torah and the Gospel.*" (7: 157) Some of their genuine scholars who embraced Islam, such as 'Abdullāh ibn Sallām, acknowledged this fact, but they counselled each other to suppress.

Several reports also confirm that the Jews were awaiting the arrival of a new messenger; this was considered imminent. The same was stated by a number of Christian priests in Arabia who were unitarians, living in isolation. But the Jews wanted this messenger to be one of their own. When God so willed that he should belong to the other branch of Abraham's seed, the Jews disliked and opposed this. Needless to say, the Qur'ānic statement is the ultimate verdict on such matters. It is the final say.

Trying to Extinguish God's Light

It seems that the verses that follow are mostly concerned with the way the Jews and the Christians received the Prophet mentioned in their

scriptures. They are denounced for the reception they gave Muḥammad and for their designs to undermine the new and final message God willed to prevail over all other religions:

> *But when he came to them with all evidence of the truth, they said: 'This is plain sorcery.' Who could be more wicked than one who invents a falsehood about God, when he is only being called upon to submit to Him? God does not bestow His guidance upon the wrongdoers. They aim to extinguish God's light with their mouths, but God will spread His light in all its fullness, however hateful this may be to the unbelievers.* (Verses 6–8)

The Jews' attitude to this new faith was a combination of hostility, evil scheming and misrepresentation. They waged a determined fight against Islam, using all means and resources, and this has continued to the present day. They levelled charges against it: "*when he came to them with all evidence of the truth, they said: This is plain sorcery.*" (Verse 6) This echoes the allegations of idolaters who had no scriptures and had no advance news of the new faith. The Jews also sought to create discord within the Muslim community. In particular, they tried to create division between the Muhājirīn and the Anṣār in Madīnah, and between the two tribes of the Aws and the Khazraj. They conspired with the hypocrites at times and with the idolaters at others. They also joined with the idolaters' attack on Madīnah, as happened in the Battle of the Moat. Their designs against the new faith also included spreading false rumours, as happened in what is known as the story of falsehood in which the main culprit was 'Abdullāh ibn Ubayy ibn Salūl. Later, they used the same tactics in the events masterminded by 'Abdullāh ibn Saba', which led to the assassination of 'Uthmān, the third Caliph. Thereafter, they tried further to undermine Islam with the fabrications and false stories they managed to infiltrate into *ḥadīth*, the reports of the history of the Prophet and the books of commentary on the Qur'ān. All this after they found themselves totally incapable of implanting any falsehood into the Qur'ān itself.

This war has continued unabated until the present day. Zionism and Christian imperialism have continued to scheme against Islam, launching or supporting aggression against Islam in every generation.

They launched the Crusades against the Muslim east, and they fought against the Muslims in Andalus in the west. They also fought against Islam in its central area launching one attack after another against the last Caliphate, i.e. the Ottoman Caliphate, which they called 'the sick man of Europe', until they managed to destroy it and divide its provinces. They needed to create false heroes in the land of Islam to carry out their schemes against it. When they needed to destroy the Caliphate as the last symbol of Islamic rule, they created in Turkey a national 'hero' and groomed his image. Thus, the Allied forces, which were in control of the Ottoman capital, retreated before his army in order to make him a great hero. In this way was he able to abolish the Caliphate regime and the Arabic language, and to separate Turkey from the rest of the Muslim world making of it a secular state. The Jews and Christians continue to create such false heroes whenever they feel the need to smash an Islamic movement in any Muslim country and replace Islamic ties with other bonds.

"*They aim to extinguish God's light with their mouths, but God will spread His light in all its fullness, however hateful this may be to the unbelievers.*" (Verse 8) This verse expresses a fact and paints a pathetic image of those enemies of Islam. It is true that they used to say about the Prophet and his message, '*This is plain sorcery*'. It is also true that they continued to scheme against Islam, trying to undermine it. It is a pathetic picture we see of them as they try to extinguish God's light with a blow from their mouths. How naïve and weak they are!

"*But God will spread His light in all its fullness, however hateful this may be to the unbelievers.*" (Verse 8) There is no doubt that God's promise will always come true. He brought His light to fullness during the lifetime of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him), when the Muslim community came into being as a living and practical representation of the system He had chosen for mankind. It was a well-defined religion with clearly delineated features so that future generations could follow in its footsteps. It was a fact of history, not a theory explained in books. He also brought His light to fullness when he perfected the favour He bestowed on Muslims, choosing Islam as their religion and making it complete. Thus, they loved their religion and were keen to fight for its cause. Anyone of them would prefer to be thrown in a fire rather than

revert to disbelief. Thus the truth of the faith lived in people's hearts and in their world. This truth continues to spring up time after time, showing that it continues to live in spite of all the sustained aggression, repeated scheming and unabated persecution campaigns waged against Islam and its followers. The fact is that God's light cannot be extinguished by people's mouths, nor can it be stifled by fire and iron-fisted tactics to which some small people resort. It may appear to tyrants, stooges made up as heroes and to Zionists that they can achieve this goal and put out God's light, but all their efforts will come to nothing.

It is God's will that this religion should prevail. Hence, it is inevitable that it will:

> *It is He who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, so that He may cause it to prevail over all other religions, however hateful this may be to the idolaters.* (Verse 9)

That God testifies that this religion of Islam is '*guidance and the religion of truth*' is the final word. God's will has been fulfilled, and this religion has prevailed over all other religions. It has prevailed by its very nature as a religion. No other religion compares with it in its nature. Pagan and idolatrous religions cannot stand up to it for a moment. Divine religions, on the other hand, find it as their final and complete version. So, in essence, Islam is the perfect and complete version of these faiths, and it will preserve its pure form for the rest of time.

Earlier divine religions were distorted by omissions and additions. Thus, they became unfit to lead human life in any direction. Even if they had remained free of distortion, they are no more than earlier versions of the divine faith which did not cater for ever-increasing life requirements, because they were intended by God to serve for a limited time only.

This shows that God's promise has come true from the viewpoint of the nature of faith. As for real life, God's promise was fulfilled at one time when Islam gained power and established its own system of government. Within one century, most of the populated world came under its rule. Then it moved peacefully into Asia and Africa to win, through advocacy efforts, more than five times the numbers who embraced it during the early *Jihād* efforts. It continues to spread without having a single state implementing it fully, after Zionism and Christian imperialism

destroyed the last Caliphate in Turkey at the hands of the 'hero' they manufactured for this purpose. It continues to spread by God's grace, despite all the schemes devised to stop its march and undermine it, and the persecution of Islamic revivalist movements everywhere at the hands of other 'heroes' Zionism and imperialism create.

This religion will continue to have other roles to fulfil in the life of humanity. It will prevail in fulfilment of God's promise. Human efforts cannot stop God's will, no matter how powerful they may be or how wicked their schemes of misrepresentation are.

These verses served as motivation to the believers to carry the trust for which God has chosen them, after it was abandoned by the Jews and Christians who were not true to it. These verses reassure the believers that they are simply the means of fulfilling God's will. They continue to provide such motivation and reassurance to new believers who are certain that God's promise will always come true. They will give new generations the same motives and reassurance until God's promise comes to be fulfilled in people's real life once more, God willing.

A Most Profitable Bargain

When the history of faith has thus been outlined and the inevitable triumph the final version of the divine faith has been promised, the Qur'ān addresses the believers – those living at the time and those of later generations – offering them the bargain of their lives. This is a transaction in which the merchandise is faith and the means to achieve it is *Jihād*:

> *Believers! Shall I point out to you a bargain that will save you from grievous suffering? You are to believe in God and His Messenger, and to strive hard in God's cause with your possessions and your lives. This is for your own good, if you but knew it. He will forgive you your sins, and [in the life to come] will admit you into gardens through which running waters flow, and into goodly mansions in the gardens of Eden. That is the supreme triumph! And [He will grant you] yet another thing that you dearly love: help from God and a victory soon to come. Give you the good news to the believers.* (Verses 10–13)

The style employed here uses a variety of forms, such as splitting sentences and reconnecting them, putting forward a question and providing the answer, inversion and transposition all aiming to drive a certain message home. The address starts in the name of faith, "*Believers!*" It is followed by an inspiring question. It is God who puts the question and holds their expectation of an answer: "*Shall I point out to you a bargain that will save you from grievous suffering?*"

Who would not wish to know what this bargain is and what its terms are! Yet here the verse ends, providing a break between two sentences to add to the expectation. The answer is given when interest in it has been heightened: "*You are to believe in God and His Messenger.*" Since they were truly believers in God and His Messenger, they are happy that this part of the answer is already met by them. "*And to strive hard in God's cause with your possessions and your lives.*" This is the main theme of the *sūrah*, and it is given here in this particular fashion to reiterate a message that has already been clarified. God knows that human beings need such repetition and variety of modes and styles in order to rise to the occasion. Realizing this, they will exert their maximum efforts to establish and preserve the divine system.

The *sūrah* goes further, presenting the bargain in an even more attractive way: "*This is for your own good, if you but knew it.*" Knowledge of the truth will encourage the person who knows it to try to obtain this beneficial matter. But the thing that is referred to as being good for us is given in more detail in the next verse. This again heightens the effect even further; providing the details after a general statement drives the point home and makes it even more desirable. "*He will forgive you your sins.*" On its own, this is more than enough. Who would need any further reward when he is assured of God's forgiveness? Who would begrudge anything if he is certain to obtain God's forgiveness? But God's grace has no limit, for the reward also includes something for the life to come. God "*will admit you into gardens through which running waters flow, and into goodly mansions in the gardens of Eden.*" This is the most profitable bargain of all, because all that is needed for this deal to be concluded is that a believer should fight for God's cause during his short life on earth. Even if this means him losing his life in this fight, he will be compensated for it with heaven and these goodly mansions where he lives in permanent bliss. "*That is the supreme triumph!*"

The account of this transaction appears to conclude here. It is indeed a highly profitable bargain which the believer makes, bartering the life of this world for that of the hereafter. A person who receives a profit ten times his capital will be the envy of everyone in the marketplace. What about one who puts up a few days of life on earth and its limited and narrow comforts to earn an eternal life with God in pure happiness and enjoyment that knows no end?

The deal was concluded between the Prophet (peace be upon him) and 'Abdullāh ibn Rawāḥah on the night when the Anṣār (the Prophet's Companions from Madīnah) pledged their support to him. 'Abdullāh said to the Prophet: "Make whatever conditions you wish, for yourself and for your Lord." He said: "My condition for my Lord is that you worship Him alone, associating no partners with Him. And my condition for myself is that you pledge you will protect me as you protect your own womenfolk and children." 'Abdullāh said: "What will our reward be if we honour our commitments?" The Prophet said: "Paradise." They said: "It is a profitable bargain. We will never seek release from our commitments, nor do we accept any cancellation."

God's grace is limitless. He knows that human beings always look for something close, in this world, which fits human nature. Therefore, He gives them the happy news of what He has determined of making this religion of Islam prevail in this world, and making its system and code triumph in the life of that same generation: "*And [He will grant you] yet another thing that you dearly love: help from God and a victory soon to come. Give you the good news to the believers.*" (Verse 13)

At this point, the bargain attains the point of supreme returns which only God, whose stores are endless, and whose grace is interminable, can give. What He gives in return, then, are forgiveness, heaven, goodly dwelling and eternal bliss, but in addition to all such profits He gives a soon-to-happen victory. Who would hold back, hesitate when God tells him of this bargain?

With all this temptation and goodly prospects, a thought may well occur to us. A believer who knows the Islamic concept of life and the universe, and appreciates the great horizons this concept opens up before us, and then looks at life without faith, with its narrow concerns and lowly levels, cannot tolerate life without faith even for a moment. He

will not hesitate for a second in joining the struggle for God's cause in order to establish the great concept of faith in real life, so that he may live with the rest of mankind in its superior reality. It may be that he would not need to have any reward other than such a life, because the struggle for God's cause is, in itself, a reward, giving us contentment and happiness in this life. Moreover, such a believer cannot live in a world devoid of faith, and cannot sit idle, not striving to establish a world governed by faith. Thus, he is strongly motivated to struggle, no matter what happens to him as a result.

Echoing Jesus' Appeal

God, however, knows that people may slacken, and that enthusiasm may dampen, efforts may wane and love of safety may lead people to accept the *status quo*, even though its level is too low. Hence, the Qur'ān administers this treatment, providing motivation and images to enhance feelings and enthusiasm, making use of every occasion and possible means to appeal to human hearts and souls. It does not rely merely on faith or on one mode of address in the name of this faith. Hence, the *sūrah* ends with a new and distinctive address, and one that carries new appeal:

> *Believers! Be helpers [in the cause] of God; just as Jesus, the son of Mary, said to the disciples: 'Who will be my helpers in God's cause?' The disciples said: 'We shall be [your] helpers in God's cause.' And so some of the Children of Israel came to believe whereas others denied the truth. But We have given those who believed strength over their enemy and they were the ones to prevail.* (Verse 14)

The disciples were Jesus Christ's pupils. It is said that they were 12 men who were close to him and who dedicated themselves to learning from him. They continued to spread his message and commandments after his term was over. This verse does not give us a detailed story: it simply outlines an attitude. Hence, we look at it in the context it is given and for the purpose it serves.

"*Believers! Be helpers [in the cause] of God.*" (Verse 14) Place yourselves in this noble position to which He elevates you. Is there a position that

is higher and more noble than that of being a supporter of God and His cause? This bargain bestows an honour that is greater than heaven and its happiness: be helpers of God, "*just as Jesus, the son of Mary, said to the disciples: 'Who will be my helpers in God's cause?' The disciples said: 'We shall be [your] helpers in God's cause.'*" (Verse 14) They were chosen for this task and earned this honour. Jesus came to give the news of the last Prophet and the last religion. It is only fitting that Muḥammad's followers should be chosen for this permanent task, just as Christ's disciples were chosen for it during their period of time. This is clearly apparent in the way the dialogue is presented in this verse.

But what was the result then? "*Some of the Children of Israel came to believe whereas others denied the truth. But We have given those who believed strength over their enemy and they were the ones to prevail.*" (Verse 14) This statement may be interpreted in one of two ways: either the believers in Christ's message are all Christians, whether they remained faithful to its original form or they are those whose faith was subject to distortion. God supported them over the Jews who did not believe in Him at all, as known from history. Or the believers were only those who continued to believe in God's oneness in defiance of those who gave Jesus divine status, those who believed in the Trinity, or those who deviated in some other way. The believers prevailed in argument, giving irrefutable evidence. Alternatively, we may understand the verse as meaning that those who continued to believe in God's oneness were supported by the last religion that endorsed their beliefs. God has made the final victory assured to this religion, as happened in history. This last sense is perhaps the most probable.

The aim of this last address is to strengthen the resolve of the believers in the last religion, the heirs of the divine message. They are the ones charged with a great task, namely the implementation of God's system on earth. They are encouraged to come forward to support God's cause: "*just as Jesus, the son of Mary, said to the disciples: 'Who will be my helpers in God's cause?' The disciples said: 'We shall be [your] helpers in God's cause.'*" Eventual victory is assured for believers who support God's cause.

Thus the *sūrah* concludes with a verse that fits the general context and drift of the *sūrah*, yet has a special colour and effect. It enriches an already rich variety of colours and effects.